

# Agencies told to buy, not collect, imagery

BY DAN CATERINICCHIA

**T**he Defense Department and other agencies will buy a majority of their imagery data through commercial satellite services rather than depending on the National Imagery and Mapping Agency and other government sources, according to a Bush administration policy published last week.

The shift is intended to let government agencies collect data for a limited range of missions in which commercial remote-sensing services are not feasible because of concerns about national security, foreign policy or other factors.

The new policy is part of an ongoing effort to transform NIMA, which provides the military services and other agencies with maps and imagery, into an agency focused on packaging and delivering data rather than collecting it.

The policy reflects a change that is already occurring due to the emerging commercial imagery market, observers say. Almost a year ago, CIA Director George Tenet instructed the intelligence community, especially NIMA, to use commercial imagery as much as possible for its mapping requirements.

John Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, which monitors space and military programs, said the new policy will improve the ability of government satellite providers to focus on the missions with the highest priority.

"This initiative should make things a bit easier for the higher-resolution classified systems, since the lower-priority requirements will be off-loaded

to the commercial systems," Pike said.

According to the policy, the secretary of Defense and the CIA director will determine the appropriate use of commercial services and provide the commercial market with information on the government's current and projected

the commercial market, unless scientific or technological reasons make it impractical. And civilian agencies are encouraged to work together, or with NIMA, to buy data.

Administration officials are concerned, however, about other governments gaining access to potentially sensitive data. According to the policy, the federal government may restrict the operations of commercial systems to limit the collection and distribution of certain information to the federal government and its allies.

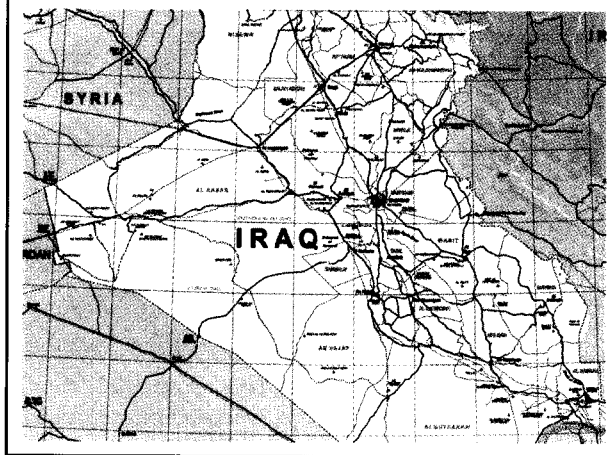
## Mapping the future

The National Imagery and Mapping Agency will soon release a request for proposals (RFP) to meet its commercial satellite imagery needs in 2006 and beyond.

The RFP for the Nextview contract will be released within the next month, according to Sandy Jacks, NIMA's commercial imagery program manager.

Earlier this year, as part of a program known as Clearview, NIMA awarded DigitalGlobe Inc. a \$72 million contract and Space Imaging Inc. a \$120 million deal to provide high-resolution satellite imagery. Agency officials will soon issue a solicitation for its future commercial imagery requirements.

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needs. The two officials also are expected to identify areas where operations could be outsourced.

The policy also directs the secretaries of Commerce and the Interior and the NASA administrator to take similar steps on behalf of civilian agencies.

Civilian agencies should run their own remote-sensing operations only when the data is not available through

commercial ground systems and processing centers to meet the growing demand.

Lenczowski said government and industry officials will work together to reach an agreement on quality and resolution requirements for imagery, including ensuring that national security needs are given priority over commercial and civilian government demands. ■

## An Industry in its Infancy

Bobbi Lenczowski, NIMA's technical executive, said the commercial satellite industry is still maturing, and though the companies are not yet profitable, they are getting closer. "We have good confidence in the sector," she said, speaking about the next generation of capabilities.

Lenczowski said the agency received a "tenfold increase" in funding for commercial satellite imagery purchases this year compared to fiscal 2002 levels, but "the funding we currently have does not saturate our need." All actual NIMA budget numbers are classified.

Chuck Herring, director of marketing communications at DigitalGlobe Inc., said his company and its competitors will be launching more satellites and delivering more ro-